

The second half of the American Dream is a college education. Educational assistance is provided to the surviving spouse of a service member or veteran who died of a service-connected injury, or the spouse of a veteran who is rated by VA to be totally and permanently disabled. The spouse has 10 years to use the entitlement. However, many surviving spouses, during this difficult transitional period, are busy raising children and working making it impossible to use the education benefit. This legislation would give an additional 10 years to the surviving spouse of a service member who died of a service-connected disability to use the benefit.

Under current law, a member of the Selected Reserve or National Guard must contribute a nonrefundable \$1,200 in order to participate in the Montgomery GI Bill education program. However, a member of the Selected Reserve must spend one year on active duty before being eligible for the program. Section 109 of the committee bill would create flexibility and allow the Montgomery GI Bill participation fee to be collected not later than 1 year after the completion of 2 years of active duty, ensuring that the Reserve or Guard has become eligible by satisfying the service requirement.

With the costs of attending college rising, it is important that we do as much for our veterans as possible so that they may reach their academic objectives. This legislation would allow VA to reimburse eligible beneficiaries for the cost of certain national admission tests, such as the Law School Admission Test, Graduate Record Exam, Graduate Management Admission Test, and Scholastic Aptitude Test, and for course credit at institutions of higher learning, such as the Advanced Placement Exam and College-Level Examination Program.

In keeping with this committee's continuing effort to aid veterans in attaining appropriate education and employment opportunities, this legislation improves the full-time apprenticeship and on-job training programs under the MGIB. Section 103 of the compromise agreement, for more than a 2-year period, would increase the full-time VA monthly educational assistance allowance payable to individuals participating in these training programs. For the first 6 months of training, the monthly benefit would increase to 85 percent from 75 percent; for the second 6 months, 65 percent from 55 percent; and the remainder of months, 45 percent from 35 percent. Additionally, section 104 of the compromise agreement authorizes VA to pay educational benefits to veterans participating in competency-based apprenticeships, in addition to time-based apprenticeships, bringing the VA program in line with the way most apprenticeship programs are structured today.

These provisions show our veterans America's continuing unwavering sup-

port of the service and sacrifice that they have made on behalf of this country. Particularly at a time when we are at war, we must ensure our service members that we will fulfill the commitment promised by Abraham Lincoln, "to care for him that shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan."

In conclusion, I specifically thank Senator SPECTER and his benefits staff for their work on this comprehensive bill, specifically Bill Tuerk, Jon Towers and Chris McNamee, and my staff—Buddy Menn, Mary Schoelen, Dahlia Melendrez, Ted Pusey, Amanda Krohn, and Tandy Barrett, who recently left the committee, for all of their hard work in helping to put this legislation together. I thank my colleagues for their support of this legislation on behalf of America's veterans and their families.

#### DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2004

Mr. GRAHAM of Florida. Mr. President, I rise today to applaud the passage of S. 2484, which reflects a compromise agreement on a new system for compensating physicians and dentists in the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, health care system, as well as alternative work schedules for VA nurses. VA doctors and dentists have not gotten a pay adjustment in over a decade. All of these measures are aimed at improving VA's ability to recruit and retain quality health care professionals. I would like to highlight some of the key aspects of this legislation.

The compromise agreement would set forth a three-tiered system for paying VA physicians and dentists. The three tiers consist of base, market, and performance pay. The base pay element is similar to that employed by other Federal agencies, also known as the General Schedule, GS, system. As such, increases would be guaranteed for every 2 years a physician or dentist remains employed by VA.

The second component of the new pay system is market pay. This element would be implemented by the Secretary in the form of pay bands that will be determined by surveys of regional salaries in the academic and private sectors. Also relevant to the market pay determinations are factors such as the scarcity, or abundance, of certain specialty physicians, type and years of experience, and board certifications. Finally, the Secretary would consult with professional review panels composed of other physicians or dentists.

The final component is performance pay. Performance pay would be awarded to doctors and dentists if they meet certain goals and measures set forth by the Secretary. Currently, VA has extensive performance measures that it utilizes to motivate its health care pro-

viders and ensure quality of care. This element has a maximum of \$15,000 or 7.5 percent of the sum of the base and market pay.

One other major section of this agreement would establish alternative work schedules for VA nurses. It is widely known that the entire country is suffering from a nursing shortage. VA anticipates that it will be hit especially hard by the retirement of a significant portion of its nursing workforce over the next 10 years. S. 2484 would allow VA to employ different types of working schedules in order to attract more nurses to the system.

I am proud to have worked on this valuable piece of legislation for our Nation's veterans, and I thank my colleagues in both Chambers of Congress for their support.

#### RECENT VISIT TO CANADA BY PRESIDENT BUSH

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I commend President Bush on his recent trip to Canada and efforts to build on our strong relations with our neighbor to the north. Canada is our Nation's largest trading partner and one of our closest allies, and this relationship must continue to remain vibrant and strong. As the co-chairman of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group, I continue to work with my peers in Canada to do what I can to assist in this effort.

Despite certain media coverage to the contrary, many Canadians warmly embrace Americans and the President's policies. I want to share comments made by Senator Jerry Grafstein in the Canadian Senate on the occasion of President Bush's visit. I ask unanimous consent that they be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

#### "MANIFEST DEMOCRACY"—THE BUSH DOCTRINE

Honourable senators, today President Bush visits Canada. We welcome President Bush, his wife and his senior advisers to our nation's capital. As Co-chair of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group, now the largest interparliamentary group in Parliament, it is my hope that Canada will actively engage President Bush and the Bush doctrine, which I call "Manifest Democracy."

Senators will recall that, in 1947 the then Minister of External Affairs, Louis St. Laurent, in Toronto defined the principles and practices of Canada's foreign policy based on these words: "freedom, liberty and democracy." Mr. St. Laurent and his then Deputy Minister, Mr. Pearson, were not confused by political debate or shifting political opinion within or outside Canada when it came to Canada's strategic interests.

In 1947, the UN was gridlocked. It was Mr. St. Laurent who convinced a reluctant Mr. King that Canada should take the lead in constructing and joining a transatlantic coalition of democracies to enhance our collective security called NATO. Mr. St. Laurent had learned well from the lessons of history—the sad experience of the League of Nations and the causes of World War II. Mr. St. Laurent believed in the democratic dialectic. Both Mr. St. Laurent and Mr. Pearson